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# An Examination of Teacher as Servant: What Makes a Christian Teacher Servant Different?

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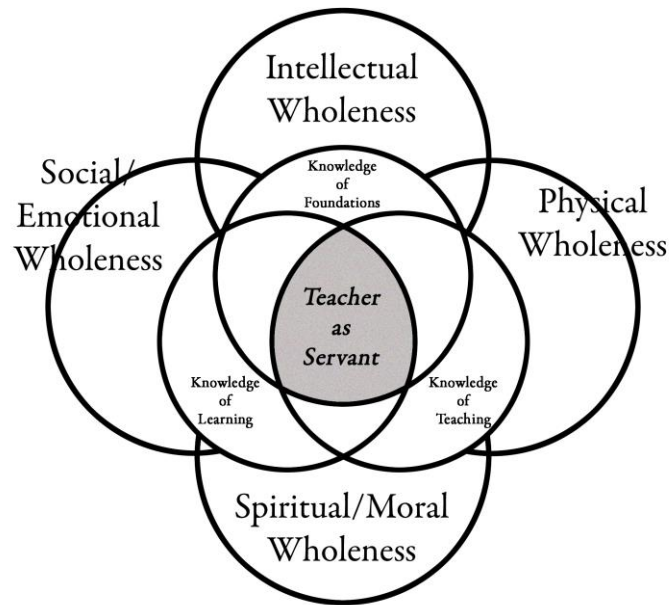
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## *An Examination of Teacher as Servant*

### *What Makes a Christian Teacher Servant Different?*



At Northwestern College a unique challenge faces pre-service teachers as they enter their practicum experiences and train for their eventual classrooms. Both Northwestern's mission statement and the education department's policy manual highlight and explain to students the expectation of being prepared for lives of service. The Northwestern College mission statement indicates that the "integration of faith, learning and living ... prepares students for lives of service to God and others." This is reiterated in the education department policy manual, as students are asked to follow the model "Teacher as Servant." The explanation in the policy manual states the following:

The goal is to serve students in the name of Jesus Christ with the expectation that they, too, will seek to offer themselves in Christian service as they go forth to teach others. In order to serve effectively in the office of teacher, students need a well-rounded, whole educational experience. [This institution] emphasizes this wholeness in its liberal arts program by stressing intellectual, physical, spiritual/moral, and social/emotional wholeness (Teacher Education Program Policy Manual, p.1).

Exploring the concepts of servanthood and servant leadership in general as well as Christian servanthood and Christian servant leadership at Northwestern College are the goals of this paper. In this paper, I will address some styles of leadership, and I will discuss how “Teacher as Servant” fits the Northwestern College Education Department. I will explore what is distinctively Christian about “Teacher as Servant” and what makes Christian service different. As an institution, we need to contemplate and wrestle with that concept. Finally, I will address the question, “What is too much service?”

While some of the following experts explicitly discuss servant leadership and others discuss servant teaching, the issue in this discussion pertains to servanthood with regard to teachers as leaders. A unique characteristic of servanthood is the tie that binds together servant teaching and servant leadership.

### ***What are some common leadership styles?***

There are numerous leadership styles, including but not limited to authoritarian, architect, systems, transformational, team, and servant. I have elected to discuss the three leadership styles that, in my opinion, most closely align with the basic premises of a typical Christian institution: transformational leadership, team leadership, and servant leadership. I will attempt to define and critique each style.

### ***Transformational Leadership***

The term “transformational leadership” certainly can resonate with a Christian institution. After all, transformation is not only Biblical, it is also a lifestyle. As its name suggests, the main element of transformational leadership is to transform people. Kuhnert (1994) indicates that leaders with the transformational style encompass a strong set of ideals and values, and know how to motivate followers to seek the greater good. Kouzes

and Posner (2002) developed a model to define the roles of transformational leadership. Those roles include: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. In reflection, one can consider all of those roles as indicative of Christian teachers. In further reflection, however, a criticism of transformational leadership may be that it treats leadership as a personality trait or disposition, rather than as a set of behaviors that can be learned. Even so, certain dispositions or personality traits are expected of an effective classroom teacher. Certainly in teacher education programs, the ability to learn behavior is important. In the teacher education program at Northwestern College, as well as in teacher education programs around the country, dispositions are being developed and assessed as an integral part of the program.

Another criticism of transformational leadership is that it can be abused. Changing values and moving people to a new vision are indicators of transformational leadership and is not always interpreted as a positive move. This is seen especially in Christian institutions if the transformations involve more liberal or post-modern thinking that doesn't always resonate with Christian values. Some Christians may even identify transformational ideas as corrupt and not aligned with Christian principles.

### ***Team Leadership***

In this type of leadership, the leader achieves team goals by analyzing the situation and selecting appropriate behaviors to guarantee team efficacy. The utilization of teams leads to an effective use of resources, better productivity, and better decisions and problem solving (Northouse, 2007). These are qualities that align with the goals of some Christian colleges. Certainly, Christians are called to work in a community of

believers. However, when wrestling with this model of leadership, one may determine that the complex and vague nature of team leadership may not be practical in an educational setting. This type of leadership greatly depends on roles of the people involved. With a continually changing student body and the influx of new faculty and staff, it could be difficult to maintain those roles effectively. Team leadership isn't always feasible, considering the current structure of some institutions of higher learning.

### ***Servant Leadership***

Moving on to servant leadership, Frick (2004) defines it as follows: "The core idea of servant-leadership is quite simple: authentic, ethical leaders, those whom we trust and want to follow, are servants first. This is a matter of intent, action, skills, capacities, and being" (p. 5). The servant leader seeks out opportunities to model servanthood to his constituency. After a while the process of being intentional is no longer a conscious task to accomplish but a natural part of the servant leader's being.

Fryar (2001) notes that teachers who are servant-leaders hold themselves accountable for their students' learning. It is important to recognize that the motivation to do so may be more personal rather than student centered. In this age of No Child Left Behind and Highly Qualified Teachers, teachers look at student grades as a way to keep their jobs, receive tenure, and possibly get promotions. Some are in it for themselves, and being a servant is not part of that equation.

Fryar's message could be interpreted by some educators as a little worrisome. Those educators argue that students should have some responsibility for their own learning. However, Fryar seems to note that teachers also need to be accountable to their learners. This is a balance and a mutual relationship of effort and respect. The true

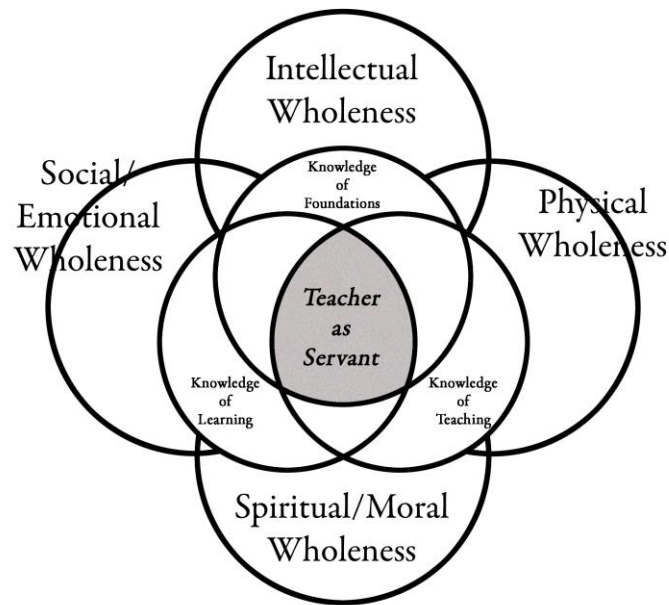
servant teacher is concerned about developing the classroom community in which the teacher and student are both engaged in the learning process.

Fryar continues by noting that servant teachers work hard to help students attain success. They inspire students to work through personal influence instead of through power. Servant teachers have a willingness to inspire both courage and hope by discovering the talents and gifts of their students. Greenleaf (1977), whose work regarding servant teaching is seminal, notes that a giving, caring, and thriving teacher is one who is called to serve and is made complete through service to others. While service can be true of good teachers, the biggest difference lies in the motivation. The servant teacher is motivated primarily by a desire to serve those with whom he comes in contact. Good teachers might be in the profession more for themselves. This is certainly not always the case, but the motivation may come from the extrinsic rewards of the profession.

Batten (1998) states that “servant leaders believe and live the concept that the development of people, as a whole and in depth, pays real dividends to both the organization and the individual” (p. 48). In contemplation of Batten’s statement as it relates to the education field, it is indeed imperative that both the “organization and the individual” reach maximum potential. A good student in a dysfunctional classroom is not going to thrive. Likewise, a poor student in a functional classroom will not flourish. Success of both requires a bidirectional relationship. Interesting to note is Patterson’s (2003) conflicting statement that servant leaders focus only on their followers. Their primary concern is their constituency and their secondary concern is for the organization.

One might think that healthy followers would beget a healthy organization. However, without attention to both, one could argue that an important element is absent.

Spears (1998) writes, “One of the greatest strengths of servant leadership is the potential for healing. Servant leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to ‘help make whole’ those with whom they come in contact” (p. 4). Spears continues his explanation of growth in wholeness. He says, “Servant leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, the servant leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within his or her institution. The servant leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything within his or her power to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees” (p. 6). Not only do employees benefit from personal, professional, and spiritual growth, but students do as well. Indeed, it is a “tremendous responsibility” to nurture, guide, enable, and inspire the students in the field.



***How does “Teacher as Servant” fit the Northwestern College Education  
Department?***

Keeping this responsibility and service model in mind, the Northwestern College education department has created a model for what they perceive a servant teacher based on the concepts of servant leadership means. Wholeness, as shown in our conceptual model, as written in our policy handbook, and as an encompassing feature in our education department, is an important aspect of our mission and our program design. In the opinion of our department, it is impossible to be a servant teacher unless one feels complete intellectually, physically, spiritually and emotionally. If a person is whole, she is not using servant teaching as a way to fill gaps in her personal development. Serving students is about helping others not helping yourself. Most classroom teachers work in isolation. Working as a team is a luxury not afforded in most classrooms. A teacher must be complete or whole as an individual, and not be dependent on a group. Other models of



leadership, including team leadership, rely on wholeness in the context of a group.

Servant teaching requires wholeness in isolation. Spears, Ferch, and Mitchell all allude to wholeness in servant teaching as a key to service learning. Neither the transformational style or the team style include “wholeness” as an important aspect of their design, even though wholeness could be easily incorporated into those concepts. Since the Northwestern College teacher education program considers wholeness the result of intentional attention to physical, spiritual, moral, and intellectual aspects, it is of upmost importance in a working model for the department. Thus the adoption of servant leadership is our focus.

Greenleaf (1977) notes that a “giving, caring, thriving” person is quite often called into a life of service. Certainly, those dispositional traits match the same qualities that we seek in our students, discuss in our classes, and assess in our pre-service teachers at Northwestern College. It seems apparent that there is more to being a teacher than classroom learning. The whole person needs to be nurtured and developed.

Ferch and Mitchell (2001) indicate that a servant leader must be physically, emotionally, and spiritually whole himself in order for the follower to benefit from servant leadership. In reflection, while transformational leadership and team leadership could be adjusted and modified to fit into the context of a Christian institution, the spiritual aspect component of servant leadership seems to be an even better fit. It is more natural because few adjustments or modifications have to be made.

### ***What is distinctly Christian about “Teacher as Servant”?***

Certainly, a humanitarian teacher could serve his students just like a Christian teacher. However, the difference between the two is the source of motivation. This discrepancy can also be seen between a servant teacher and a Christian servant teacher. A Christian teacher keeps in mind that Christ was the ultimate teacher and tries to imitate Him in the classroom. Christ might not have adhered to all the standards and benchmarks of the present day, but His general notion of servanthood is still alive today. Jesus did His best work with the marginalized, otherwise known in today’s classrooms as the “at risk students”.

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus modeled the importance of caring and compassion. He can be considered a servant leader to emulate in the classroom. Part of his ministry included service to those he encountered. He walked beside people, listened to their questions, put His followers before himself, and healed the wounds of the infirmed. A Christian teacher also devotes her life to service and imitates Jesus’ example in order to serve her students. The Northwestern College mission statement purports that we will “prepare students for lives of service to God and others.” How is that service different?

### ***Motivation***

It can be argued that motivation for serving is different for a Christian teacher and a humanitarian teacher. A humanitarian teacher might be motivated by approval or affirmation by other people, monetary compensation, getting a better evaluation, promotions, helping the common good, or the desire to leave a legacy. Her goal could possibly be a concern for the well-being of students and may affect the love given to the

students. While a Christian teacher may have those same motivations, she most likely is also motivated by a desire to serve God and follow His commands. The motivation might be a commitment to being obedient, to being an image bearer, or being a witness. Harro Van Brummelen (2002) suggests that the calling to serve comes from within. He says “we carry out this calling (to serve) because we have a passion to serve God, our students and our teachers.” Simpson (2005) seems to contrast with Van Brummelen by noting that the motivation does not arise from just a passion to serve God, but arises from “moral responsibility as adults and educators [not to] leave the formation of the mind and morals to nature, chance, or culture.” (p. 103). The message he sends seems to point toward some kind of innate desire to serve others. Merta (1972) gives further evidence that serving others causes people to feel better. He indicates that we have an “interior attraction which tells [us], by a nice warm glow of satisfaction, what is right” (p. 94).

Motivation is complicated for Christian and secular service. Certainly, a Christian’s motivation to serve may be the same as a non-Christian’s. Both Christians and non-Christians may serve for monetary gain, recognition, or praise. They may serve to bring fulfillment to their empty lives. They may serve to feel important or needed. The motivation for Christian service is certainly out of a deep and abiding love for our Savior, and out of a desire to bring Him glory. That service should be a demonstration of love and should be an effort to nurture an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

### ***Vertical Dimension***

The motivation may be different for a Christian teacher than a humanitarian, but is the service itself different? I would argue that there is a vertical dimension to both motivation and service for the Christian teacher that is not found in other teachers. This

vertical dimension is attributed to the two-way power of prayer that the Christian teacher submits, and the spirit of Christ that is within that teacher. Gowdy (2007) supports the argument by stating that “prayer and the Holy Spirit are essential, absolutely vital” (p. 58). He goes on to note that prayer changes our hearts more than it changes our circumstances. This is in tension with my worldview, as I continually see the power of prayer change both me and my surroundings. The first contention resonates with me, because I have personally been transformed through prayer and have seen the tangible effects of prayer in my life. However, I struggle with the concept that prayer changes our hearts more than it changes our circumstances. I don’t believe I can compare the degree to which one it affects more. In my opinion, prayer affects both our hearts and our circumstances. No matter what the various opinions are, it is obvious that prayer directly correlates with the spiritual life of a Christian teacher.

The Christian teacher relies not only on her own abilities, but seeks divine intervention as well. Her ability to serve is magnified by the fact that Christ lives in her, breathes in her, provides for her, and cares for those she serves. He desires that His will is done, and she provides a conduit of service through her love.

### ***Perceived Difference***

“Vertical dimension” and “motivation” aside, is service from a Christian or a non-Christian teacher perceived by students as the exact same thing? Gowdy suggests that it is not. In his book (2007) “Agape Love: How Important Is It Anyway?” Gowdy points to the characteristics of Christian love and service. He notes that it is “something tangible, real, and spiritual” (p. 48). Students may not be able to attribute the positive classroom environment and attitude of the teacher to Christian love. However, there seems to be a

connection people feel when encountering those who love and serve in Jesus' name. In my view, Christian teachers ought to be different from non-Christian teachers. Despite the lack of tangible evidence in literature, my own experience suggests that there truly is a real difference.

In thoughtful consideration I would like to note that Jesus Christ's love was and still is a magnet for flocks of people. Christian service is not an internal feature that goes unnoticed. That feature bubbles to the surface and becomes visible in action. The effervescent nature of Christian service is both felt and seen by the students served and proceeds to be manifested in the attitudes and behaviors of everyone in the classroom.

### *Defining Christian Service*

It is difficult to define a difference between Christian and secular service because good and caring things are done by both Christian and non-Christian people. There are some Christian authorities in the area of servanthood that have attempted to articulate a definition of Christian service. Frankly, I found their definitions to be disappointing, as they did not seem to relay a difference between Christian and non-Christian servitude. Van Dyk (2000), a Christian scholar, states that Christian "servanthood consists of two dimensions. The first is stewardship or caretaking. ...An additional [dimension] is healing, reconciliation, and peace-making" ( p.66). Gant (2007) mirrors Van Dyk with his statement that one who loves should do justice by "no longer contributing to (society's) ills" and show mercy by "endeavoring to correct existing ills" (p. 27). Marzono (2005) also indicates that "stewarding resources" and "healing wounds" (p. 17) are indicative of Christian servitude. Fikkert (2007) certainly adheres to those statements by noting that "the entire educational endeavor is geared toward equipping and motivating students to

become ministers of reconciliation” (p. 367). These Christian authors all note that reconciliation, correcting existing ills, and healing wounds define Christian service, but they also correlate with what we know about humanistic servitude. The difference can mostly be attributed to the desire of the Christian teacher to serve the Lord. Given my experience, the motivation truly makes a difference.

Harry Blamires’ (1963) distinction between secular and Christian thinking and Christian service resounds with my own views. He wrote, “To think secularly is to think with a frame of reference bounded by the limits of our life on earth: it is to keep one’s calculations rooted in this-worldly criteria. To think Christianly is to accept all things with the mind as related, directly or indirectly, to man’s eternal destiny as the redeemed and chosen child of God” (p. 44). His differentiation is not based so much on the act of service, but on the mindset and limitations of service. Finally, Blamires has a definition that truly defines the difference: the humanist only plans for his lifetime, whereas the Christian is planning for eternity.

With the purpose of eternity in mind while teaching in the classroom, teachers are modeling a way of being that reflects the Kingdom and prepares students for a lifetime of service to others. The Christian servant teacher helps students develop their gifts, so they too can serve in a secular or non-secular environment. The secular teacher prepares students for a worldly life, and fails to address the life of eternity.

***What makes Christian service distinct in the context of specific dispositions like love, patience, and enthusiasm?***

An exploration of distinct servant dispositions may serve to delineate the differences in Christian service. A servant has many duties that are articulated in God’s

Holy Word. Scripture indicates that love, patience, and enthusiasm are servant qualities. Scripture also indicates that servants follow God's will, please God, and serve the Lord with gladness. In the Bible, there are many examples of the type of servants God has designed us to be. These illustrations aide us in the task of being disciples in our disciplines. They provide concrete models of how servanthood can be carried out. It is not always apparent to everyone how to be a servant, therefore, having a resource to imitate provides another way for us to reach potential servant leaders. These servant qualities help us integrate faith and learning, breathing life into the model "teacher as servant."

### *Love*

A servant must serve with selfless love, work for the best interests of others, and advance the needs of others over her own needs. We can show our love to God by serving others, as shown in John 21: 15-17:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

God calls us to love and to show that love in service by "feeding His sheep." In this passage, Peter is in a parallel position of the Good Shepherd "who puts the life of the sheep before all other concerns" (Dunn, 2003 p. 1211). These verses proclaim that love is not just an emotion. Love is also an action. According to Dunn, this passage asks us to

feed the sheep willingly, not because it is some kind of requirement. The hope is that by requiring students to be intentional about being a servant, servanthood will eventually become a natural part of their being. We should feed the sheep because we love them, to serve God's kingdom, and to be an example of how to serve. The concept of being "examples" has pedagogical implications that are very pertinent in the education field. The research shows people learn much better when shown models or examples. Modeling servanthood enables the students we serve to learn how to serve. They are watching the actions of the teacher, and not just hearing words.

As much as I would like to show a strong differentiation between Christian love and secular love, I believe the distinction is more subtle and tenuous. Although I'm reluctant to criticize the renowned C. S. Lewis, I do disagree with a certain point that he makes as he speaks of "gift love" in his book Four Loves. He lists the qualities of "gift love" and notes that this type of love is Christ-like. My perception is that he seems to think "gift love" qualities like giving happiness, comfort, and protection are only Christian attributes. However, I feel these attributes are ones that both the secular and Christian teacher can have. Again, in my opinion, the motivation for love is what separates Christian gift love from secular gift love.

Other authors, like Jacobsen and Gowdy, speak of agape as unconditional love, and allude that Christians have cornered the market on that. This assertion clashes with my understanding of unconditional love because I believe that a non-Christian teacher can also love unconditionally. Manning (1977), however, carefully articulates that agape love is much more than unconditional love. He says that it is a "God-given love that the Lord commands us to give back to Him as well as others—a love that no one, in his own



strength and by his own effort, could possibly have” (p 10). He defines it further by stating, “Agape does not flow from the nature of man; it is, in fact, alien to it. Agape love flows from the heart of God” (p. 10). In other words, agape love does not set expectations, it is pure and real. It is an attempt to love others as God loves.

### ***Motivation for love***

Subtle differences also lie in the motivation for love. A Christian teacher loves children with the knowledge that they are image bearers. Instead of the love being simply an emotion or a feeling, it is an action with an object, and that object is a reflection of our God. Stronks (1999) echoes this by stating, “Perhaps most fundamental to my general approach to teaching is my belief that students are created as image bearers of God” (p. 60). A Christian teacher also loves children with the knowledge that they are sinners in need of redemption. Stronks (1999) notes that “we are a broken, hurting people” (p.33). and Palmer (1990) notes that if we are to be fully human and helpful to others, we must recognize this sinful nature and respond to it. A humanistic teacher, on the other hand, may love through the lens that children are innately good. In my career, I have had many opportunities to meet teachers that obviously love their students. Both Christian and secular teachers can love their students, but a dissimilarity between the two is that Christian teachers often associate their reasons for loving and caring more deeply because they want to model Christ-like behaviors of unconditional love. They see the likeness of Christ in children and realize that encounters with children, as with all people, are like encounters with Christ. The secular teacher’s motivation for love, while coming from a genuine kindness and caring, is not tied into Christ and Christian principles.

Christian teachers' motivation to love also stems from their desire to praise God and to show God their thankfulness. Their prayer is that others may see God's light shining through them. Love is a witness to others in the hopes that it will draw others into a life of living in Christ.

Our love should be a reflection of Christ's love. Jacobsen (2006) agrees: "[T]he love and grace we receive from God are refracted through our lives and redirected towards others" (p. 19). That redirection isn't a feeling as much as it is an action. The art of teaching is a visible act of God's love. I've had the privilege of witnessing to many Northwestern pre-service teachers in the classroom. Their love for students is apparent and when I ask them about it, they are able to connect their love for students to their love for Christ. Many Northwestern pre-service teachers feel called by Christ to serve in the classroom.

A servant must care about others more than he cares about himself. The literature is riddled with the word "care." Some obvious examples include McEwan (2002), who shares that teachers should exemplify "caring" and "empathy" (p.29); Smith (2005) indicates that teacher educators should demonstrate caring so that students can have a model of that behavior; Agne (1992) specifies that "teacher education majors should know the importance of, and have an opportunity to be exposed to, those teacher beliefs which make a difference in teacher effectiveness, especially the caring ethic" (p. 123); and Noddings (1995) indicates that if we truly care, we have the desire to do our very best for the students in our care. Noddings specifies that caring is "the glue that binds teachers and students together and makes life in classrooms meaningful" (p. 681). McEwan, Smith, Agne, and Noddings all are in agreement on the importance of care, but

nowhere do they differentiate between Christian and non-Christian caring. Is caring about others an undertaking that either Christian or non-Christian teachers could follow? Yes. Is it somehow different? I would hope so. After extensive reading and study, I feel able to break Christian caring into three distinct categories. They are care to confront, caring above and beyond, and stewardly care.

### *Care to Confront*

This issue can be traced back to the beginning, when God said to Cain, “Where’s your brother?” His response, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” is a typical response that we might hear today from non-Christian teachers. However, Christian teachers are likely to respond in a more caring, confronting way. Surely, a non-Christian teacher can care to confront, does not base confrontation on Biblical ideals, commandments, and truths like the Christian teacher. Wolterstorff (2004) says that we are called “both to act justly and to struggle against injustice and for justice” (p. 143). This struggle is found in confrontation.

There are several models in the Bible that portray different ways to confront in Christian love. 1 Corinthians 4:14 provides a pattern for appropriate confrontation by showing us that when we confront in love we must let the person we are confronting know our warmth and their personal worth. Paul says, “I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.” He makes it clear that he is not trying to demean them, but is attempting to protect and support them. Confrontation is an act of love.

Another way we confront in Christian love is to be an example of the behavior we are looking for. Teachers have a captive audience because students look up to them and try to emulate their behavior. Being a model is both challenging and rewarding, but it is

obvious that when the Christian teacher chooses to model Christ-like behavior, others benefit by their actions.

The Bible models various ways to confront in Christian love, but certainly a non-Christian can confront in these ways as well. A non-Christian can let others know their “warmth and their worth.” A non-Christian can model correct behavior. A non-Christian can give choices. What is the difference? The Christian teacher bases confrontation on all the Biblical ideals, commandments, and truths, while the non-Christian teacher bases confrontation on a different purpose-perhaps to simply teach her students how to act appropriately in the classroom.

### ***Caring Above and Beyond***

Caring above and beyond is modeled in Luke 15 by the story of the lost sheep. The shepherd leaves 99 sheep in the open country and goes looking for the one. There is joy and rejoicing that occurs when the sheep is found. This story of caring above and beyond is an excellent example of indiscriminate love beyond measure, caring, or grace. This does not mean that a teacher leaves his classroom hanging to find one lost student. What it does mean is that a teacher goes one step further and does what it takes to make sure everyone’s needs are met. This kind of grace goes far beyond the normal wear and tear of a teacher’s care. God doesn’t follow the model of utilitarian leadership where you do what is best for the most. He cares about the least. One sheep missing keeps the flock from being whole.

Is above and beyond caring a good thing? In my opinion, it truly is. For me, it is incredibly personal. God has cared for me my whole life. I can see evidence of His

presence in my decisions, my opportunities and my outlook. I can especially feel His presence now as I deal with the stresses of work and family issues that are burdening me.

As a teacher, I consider it my responsibility to shepherd students toward finding out how God is working in their lives. My hope is that they can transfer the knowledge that God is caring for every student in the class into their future classrooms and realize that they should do the same. Given my experiences, I feel a Christian teacher has a higher calling for a greater level of care.

### *Stewardly Care*

As a child, I would walk through the fields with my grandpa. I would listen as he marveled at the beauty of the land that God had provided and said that it was his responsibility to serve God by caring for the land the best that he could. The land was on loan and he was determined to leave it better than when he found it. Whether working with land as farmers or working with people as teachers, we are stewards. We care with the knowledge that this creation—land and people—are His.

Stewardship involves an awareness that our creator is working out His plan for this world. Stewardship calls us, as His followers, His disciples, and His apprentices, to involve ourselves in God's work through stewardly use of our God-given gifts, time, talents, and service. It is important to note that a non-Christian teacher could take care of the world, but she wouldn't be doing it as an obligation to the Creator as a form of worship.

In truth, knowledge of God being in control and building a new creation for us in heaven might cause the Christian teacher to be apathetic to his calling. For some Christians, their reliance on God to redeem the world may result in a lackadaisical

attitude towards care of the earth. For other Christians, the call to be stewards may generate a level of commitment more in tune with the needs of the earth. Plantinga (2002) notes that “to have dominion is to act like the mediator of creation. This means that a human steward of God’s good creation will never exploit or pillage; instead she will give creation room to be itself” (p.31).

I concur with Gant (2007) when he says “[i]n loving their neighbors, the members of God’s kingdom serve as agents of healing. In doing so, they both represent and promote the kingdom among those who have not yet embraced it” (p.27). This witness is reassuring to me and to teachers that graduate from Northwestern’s education program. The ultimate desire for Kingdom workers is to “represent and promote” God’s kingdom wherever they serve. In the case of our graduates, this station might be in public schools, ESL classrooms, Christian schools, or church education programs. As Christians, it is their obligation to be salt and light no matter where God calls them to serve.

### *Patience*

If a servant must be patient and understanding and if we are required to “be kind to everyone,” what was that horrific and blatant incident between Christ and the money changers? In Matthew 21:12 it states, “Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.” This verse shows Jesus’ “rulership over his Temple both by words and action” (Mills, 1995 p. 966). In everything He did, He was mindful of His mission and obeyed God’s will. How does patience relate to this account? God wants Christians to show patience, but He also desires that Christians take a stand, show accountability, and make an impact for God. Northwestern’s new teachers may not go out

into the field to “turn tables” within their first few years of teaching, however, the hope is that they will do their best to observe the overall situation of the schools in which they work. When they’ve had enough experience and have developed enough patience, it will be time for them to make an impact. The hope is they will seek out opportunities to stand up for the things they believe in, basing their decisions on what they know to be Biblically true.

### *Enthusiasm*

My perception is that a servant should do all things with enthusiasm and passion and that both of those characteristics are necessary components in living and in teaching. While working with all our heart is a common denominator for both Christian and secular servant-teachers, working for the Lord is different. It is a mindset. Although it is not obvious to the children being served, the subtle nuances can certainly be felt. Enthusiasm, or passion, stirs others to action. McEwan (2002) notes that a master teacher “exhibits his or her own unique style, bringing drama, enthusiasm, liveliness, humor, charisma, creativity, and novelty to his or her teaching” (p. 59). This enthusiasm results in student action.

Deciding to “Work for the Lord” is a conscious commitment to make a difference in the world for God. God requires passion, He asks us to remove any tepid nature and be on fire for Him. This type of fire requires subversive behavior. By law, a Christian teacher is not allowed to profess his faith in the public classroom. However, by living out her faith, she can be an example of passion that could possibly be interpreted as Christ-like. Fisher (1999) notes many instances in which subtle Christian living can be exemplified in a classroom: giving time for silent meditation, allowing student religious

groups to use school facilities, and allowing children to ask questions about their faith. However, if these overt opportunities don't arise, there are many implicit ways to show one's faith. Actions speak louder than words, and the students are watching their teachers.

### ***God's Will and Prayer***

A servant can determine God's will in her life through prayer, scripture reading, and reflection. "God's silence can also be a way of instructing and changing us" (Jacobsen, 2006, p. 62). Not only must she know God's will, but she must have the desire and find joy in doing God's will as well. A secular teacher relies on her own decisions in service. A Christian teacher relies on her own decision-making processes, and also on prayer to determine God's input in both small and big decisions. A Christian teacher is continually seeking to hear God's will and to do God's will. Certainly, Christian teachers pray over decisions and then integrate that prayer with reflection, training, and practice. Prayer without reflection, training, and practice is simply not enough. Prayer is a powerful force in decisions regarding service. Christian teachers are aware of how the Lord is leading them as they work with students in all facets of instruction. Christian teacher-servants communicate in prayer daily. It is this aspect that differentiates a Christian servant from a servant who does not believe in Christ. A servant must seek to follow Christ through constant prayerful communication.

### ***Pleasing God***

A Christian servant must please God. Instead of being a "people pleaser," a servant does not seek applause, her work is for God, an audience of One. This contrast between satisfying human or divine is extremely evident. It is very difficult to maintain



the paradigm of pleasing God in lieu of people. Sometimes it is challenging for Christians to make decisions according to God's will because they may not please students or co-workers. While Christian teachers and non-Christian teachers may both be dedicated to pleasing people, a Christian teacher is also working for God's approval. A servant must stay true to the Lord and follow His design for her life. Certainly, Christians seek to please God. Van Brummelen (2002) stated, "What counts in God's sight is how faithfully we serve." It is difficult for me to totally agree with that statement, as we are saved through grace and not saved through works. However, because Christians know they are saved by grace, they feel more compelled to serve in order to visually express their love for God. Through service, Christians celebrate the fact that they are saved and praise God for the gift He has given them.

### *Serve the Lord with Gladness*

Although everyone's work is sometimes an unwanted obligation, a Christian servant must consider her work not just a duty, but also a joy. While no one can be passionate and enthusiastic all the time, a teacher will be more likely to exhibit those qualities when she realizes that that particular mindset is helpful in serving the Lord. A Christian servant-leader finds happiness in glorifying God when she serves Him. Christians take pleasure in understanding that their calling, work, and service is heaven-inspired. Teaching becomes another form of worship as teachers become His hands and His feet. A non-believer may serve others with a happy spirit, but serving the LORD with gladness is different. Not only is the motivation different, but the recipient is also different. While the non-Christian teacher is extending service to the student, the Christian teacher is extending service to the student and to the Lord. Christian teaching is

using the spiritual gifts you've been given to glorify God and bring spiritual gladness to the hearts you serve.

It is incredibly difficult to differentiate Christian and humanistic service in the areas of love, patience, and enthusiasm. However, Christians are able to turn to Scripture for guidelines in how to follow God's will, please God, and serve the Lord with gladness.

### ***What is too much service?***

Certainly, there must be limits to the amount of service that can be expected from teachers. Many students will seek the easiest path possible and require more service from their teachers than is in their best interest. One must grapple with the tenuous nature of this subject. Some hardliners may concur with Gant (2007) who says that doing too much "instead of fostering wholesome independence, breeds a condition that destroys dignity and perpetuates dependency" (p. 35). Gant seems to be hinting that a hands-off or light housekeeping policy is the best kind of servant-hood to foster dignity and independence in students. Van Brummelen (2002) also indicates that this type of structure best suits students. He stresses that "while schools foster the love and justice undergirding shalom, they should also provide room for students to explore and develop on their own" (p 63). Wolterstorff (2004) suggests that the goal for students in Christian institutions is to "encourage them to struggle for shalom" (p. xix). Wolterstorff's definition of shalom is more than just peace. He translates the word to mean something similar to flourishing. In order for students to flourish they need to learn to care for themselves. I wrestle with the concept of allowing students to struggle because my experience has shown me that treating students lovingly helps them overcome their struggles. This challenge of allowing students to struggle requires another shift in my worldview. As an educator I

need to refrain from spoon feeding and present students with real challenges. As a Christian teacher I need to realize that the right path is not always the easiest path. Also I need to keep in mind that tough love is...tough. Just like the Christian teacher, the secular teacher can challenge students. Once again, the difference lies in motivation.

A subtle variant in the continuum of allowing struggles vs. amount of service is conveyed by Freire (1973) who states that “the important thing is to help men help themselves, to place them in consciously critical confrontation with their problems, to make them the agents of their own recuperation” (p. 16). At first glance, his stance is certainly a “pick yourself up by your bootstraps” philosophy, in which service is best instituted by letting students fend for themselves. However, while reading his text, and ruminating over its context, one can conclude that “help(ing) men help themselves” is indeed an act of service. Freire suggests that effective modeling shows students how to survive in challenging situations. Although most of Freire’s work is done in the economical and political context of Brazil, it can be applied to students in general, regardless of where they live. In Christian institutions, it is often assumed that the struggles students face are fewer than in the public sector. On the contrary, my personal experience teaching at a Christian college has shown that Christian students have just as many struggles including: issues with relationships, with time and stress, and with academics. The same struggles happen in both private and public schools. How the students choose to work through their struggles is what sets them apart.

Others, with a softer position, may agree with Brown (2007) who says, “Leaders who respond appropriately to the commitment and competence levels of their subordinates are truly serving them” (p. 92). This position certainly is in tension with

Freire, as Brown bases service on the student's level of competence and need.

Northwestern's writing room policy certainly exemplifies Brown's position. Various departments at Northwestern foster modifications in assignment and adjust curriculum to best meet students' needs. Even the Admissions Department actively seeks students with various limitations and promises support for students based on those needs. According to Wolterstorff (2004), this is an example of teaching for shalom. He says that "shalom commands us to pray and struggle not only for developing the potentials of creation, but also for the release of the captives" (xiii). Struggling students can be the captives of an educational institution. Their "release" results in the flourishing that is desired for them, but that release can only happen if the service they receive is based on and centered around their need. As an institution, Northwestern College will in fact flourish and blossom, experiencing true shalom if needs are met.

A more eclectic approach to the style of service resonates with me. At first glance, Gant's view of giving students a modicum of service, sculpting, and stripping the amount of support to a bare minimum, seems brutal. However, this method may allow students to become humbled in their struggles, rely on God, and rejoice in their subsequent successes. This process would indeed allow students to have dignity and feel success in their achievements. Freire's approach of helping students help themselves can complement Gant's position. Some students benefit from modeling or teaching that leads them to help themselves. Brown's, match-the-service-to-the-need tactic could coincide with the other approaches, but it should be carefully and prayerfully administered. People, in their sinful nature, can mask their abilities, look for excuses, and seek help when they are capable of managing on their own. The skillful educator is able to identify

the students who are masking their abilities and lead them on a path of self reliance. The Christian educator should incorporate all of these service styles while exemplifying Christian love.

I have personally experienced the successful integration of all three styles. Certainly, in my struggles to fulfill the tenure paper requirement, I've been the recipient of all three levels of service. I've experienced the "hands-off" policy. I felt alone, lost, and discouraged when my mentors seemingly turned their backs on my needs and I learned to display total reliance on God. The struggle that I experienced led to the "flourishing" that I am now enjoying. Others have modeled various aspects of the tenure paper process, by showing examples of "engaging the text." This direct instruction gave me the tools I needed to move forward. Finally, others "responded to my competence level." They patiently brought me through this process with scaffolding and shoulder-to-shoulder assistance. I have graciously felt God's hand working through those that offered their assistance. That gift of service has given me the heart of service in return. If Northwestern's mission is to "prepare students for lives of service to God and others," we must exemplify various forms of serving from our hearts and with our hands as we teach and work side by side with our students. The education department, with "teacher as servant" at the heart of our model, and "teacher as servant" in the center of our hearts, must work hard to teach servant-hood, model servant-hood, and actively be servants at all of these levels. We must be who we want our students to be.

### ***Concluding Observations and Recommendations***

*Luke 22:27 “For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”*

To me, the Teacher as Servant model serves as a helpful tool for articulating the vision of serving students. If we are to be “agents of shalom in the world” as Wolterstorff stresses, we must do more than show students how to understand the world, we must facilitate students in their efforts to change the world. Touching students’ hearts for service is as important as molding their intellect. Wolterstorff (2004) indicates that “the goal is not just to impart to students a Christian world-and-life-view but to equip and motivate them for a Christian way of being and acting in the world.” Being “equipped” and being “motivated” complement each other as two sides of the same coin. Students will not desire to serve unless they are motivated, and they will not know how to serve unless they are equipped. Wolterstorff continues by noting, “[T]here is not a shred of evidence that simply putting abstract theory in front of them (students) will alter their actions” (p. 34). Van Dyk (2000) echoes that sentiment, by stating, “If we train only for marketable skills, academic excellence, and good moral behavior, but neglect the higher purpose of Christian discipleship, we lose our distinctiveness as Christian educators” (p. 64). We need to encourage students think deeply and to act meaningfully. Service should be learning about God’s world and responding to that knowledge.

There is certainly a tension in the academic world at Northwestern College as we grapple with the importance of intellect. The brain, albeit a powerful tool, is diminished in capacity if it isn’t coupled with a heart of service. Wolterstorff (2004) indicates that colleges must be “more concerned than ever before with building bridges from theory to

practice” (p. 34). The brain certainly has value, but when linked with the hands and heart of service the result can be earth changing and shalom building. John Dewey (1982), a foundational leader in the education field, stresses that “the business of the educator is to see to it that the greatest possible number of ideas acquired by children and youth are acquired in such a vital way that they become *moving* ideas” (p.267). It is not enough to KNOW; it is imperative that we DO.

Greenleaf (1977) asks in his book Teacher as Servant: "Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" (p. 7). Indeed, students model after their servant-hearted instructors. Northwestern’s mission statement, to “prepare students for lives of service to God and others,” can be accomplished if we serve our students. If the instructors model Christ’s servanthood example, our students will reflect His glory. As Christian servant leaders, we must become “healthier, wiser, freer” just like Greenleaf suggests, to show the students who we really are. We must submit to the Spirit’s control and let Him use us for His glory. We must trust that the Holy Spirit will work through us so that those we serve can become servants themselves.

There are many ways to breathe life into the “Teacher as Servant” model. Service can have a variety of nuances in a college institution. For professors, it can be found in modifying assignments to meet students’ needs, listening to a student with difficulties, providing support for students with tests and assignments, and serving as an advocate on behalf of a student. For students, it can be found in service projects, practicum hours with children, or assisting others in the class with group assignments and group study. Faculty and students must be persistent and dogmatic in their quest to serve.

Research provides little evidence to distinguish between the servant educator and Christian servant educator. Motivation, as has been mentioned throughout this paper, seems to be the definitive difference and is what we strive to ignite in our students at Northwestern. We know that the best service is done in love and we try to motivate pre-service teachers to show unconditional love in their teaching.

When I think of unconditional love and service, a story from my childhood comes to mind. As a little girl, my mom often asked me to clean my room. I would boldly rebut, “But why?” and she would patiently say “Just because.” She never finished the sentence, but it was understood. I did it “just because” I loved her and “just because” she loved me. I did it “just because” I was part of the family. When I was serving in this capacity, I didn’t have to choose between serving her or serving God. I was serving both. A parallel can be drawn in comparison with our lives of service. A life of service isn’t a choice between serving God or serving people. All that we do is for God. Scripture says, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40). A love for God is shown through our love for others. Servant-hood is a matter of the heart. We do it “just because”.



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